

Images Leading to Self-Realization

—Swami Akhandanananda Saraswati

How are we attracted towards images? How have we gradually developed an abiding interest in their worship? It is thus. Our ideas paved the link between God and the image. God was projected on the image and subsequently the image became God, while it goes without saying He is our veritable Self. When we earnestly try to understand conceptual evaluation involved in image-worship, we are amazed to arrive at a wonderful unity of the Self (Atman) and the Absolute (Brahman). It is marvellous to observe how the indivisible self expresses itself both as the world of perception and the percipient and the individual Self and the empirical world.

THE PRASAD

Initially one develops delight in the sweetness of the *prasad* given in the temple. One is further attracted to the temple desiring to escape some trials and tribulations and to achieve some desired end. Also it is not unusual to long for the successful completion of a ventured enterprise and its accompanying glory to get established in reputation. For that also one finds image-worship an effective means. It is also very common that

many people visit the God has become expressed temple out of their in the image through art, respect to follow the good ritual, injunctions, imagina- example of elderly scholars. tions, reason. In In all these stages one implicitly believes in the potency of these promptings. In all such cases, one's devout presence gets consequently rewarded by the *prasad* in its gross or subtle form. From such *prasad* we get benefits ranging from the taste of the tongue to the purity of the mind as well as the certitude of the intellect.

THE SCEPTICS

With urban influence came critical sceptics. They began to shout "Stone Gods and Stone Temples ! Alas !! Every thing has gone to pieces !!! What kind of God is this ?" The Sceptics should know that there is God in these Stones also, because God is everywhere. The inexpressible

the Linga one can cognize the Primordial cause, the abiding presence of God (ISWARA), the Principle of manifestation (Prakriti) and the non-duality of the Absolute (Ekam Evam Adwitiyam). One really enters his self by visiting temples. In the temple one observes God by having the *Darshan* of the image. He experiences the complete dedication of the whole world to God by looking at the worship. The individual is a manifestation of God. The finitude of the ego is unreal. It functions diversely; for God alone exists. Divorced from God nothing exists.

THE REAL WORSHIP

When as oblation we offer leaves, flowers, sandal pastes,

IMAGES LEADING TO SELF-REALIZATION

etc. we offer the very quint-essence of the physical Universe, each of which possesses its own characteristics of beauty or intrinsic value to make such oblations sufficiently worthy. If the worship is motivated by any selfish desire or any material gain, it is not praise-worthy, but if the motive covers the welfare of the entire world and is aimed at the realization of the supreme joy of the Self, then it is a real and perfect worship.

ART IN DIFFERENT FORMS

Worship even in ignorance may also become creditable if it brings in its chain even an iota of self-realization. If an act of worship brings peace and joy nobody would call such an experience the fruit of ignorance. On the contrary, it disseminates knowledge. Therefore, Dharma (right living),

Upasana (devotional adoration) and Yoga (diabolical adherence to non-dual life) are not mere activities. They are different aspects of superior art. The very foundation of a perfect life is implied in such an art. Real Dharma is the art of establishing perfect harmony between the perceptual and the functional aspects of life. The art of annihilating attachment (Raga) and hatred (Dwesh) is Upasana. Quiet-ing the mind by eradicating the modes of mind is the art of Yoga.

THE USE OF ART

To bring the inexpressible aspects of the Absolute in a form, which makes it easy for the mind to grasp it by gross representation is the use of art. Thus art ultimately will help us to cognize the subtle, the subtler and the subtlest aspects of the

Absolute and also to present them in this ingenious way to the masses. Art alone gives form to the abstract. The subtle idea that takes shape in the mind is transferred to characteristic impressions of behavioural pattern through art. Thus that which was primarily accessible only to the inner eye, becomes the object for the outer eye too. When our eyes are turned towards the idea depicted in the form of the image, they go beyond the superficial form and comprehend the imperishable, formless, modeless aspect of reality common to the perceptual mind. This is the great potentiality of art. What is subjective for the artist, becomes objective in his art.

ART HELPS REALIZATION

I have no hesitation to say that sculpture and other forms of temple-art go a long

way to help people to realize the Absolute which is otherwise impossible to grasp. The nature of the carnal aspect of the Absolute is dormant like the subtle form of the plant lying hidden in the seed before germination. This is evident in the Shiva Linga.

SRI JAGANNATHJI

The very first day when I saw at Kashi, Jagannath represented by a piece of stone without head or limbs, I was overjoyed and was struck with wonder. To me this gave, in all eloquence, the Absolute transcendence of name, form and action which is the purest state of Parabrahman. This great state of inaction is also implied in the reclining imagery of Mahavishnu (as depicted in the Anantasayana of Sri Padmanabha). Such wonderful ideas of the inconceivable Absolute are so masterly

depicted in the various images by artists who could penetrate into the very depth of the LINGUA MYSTICA.

ART PURIFIES LIFE

The sublimity of such art can be fully appreciated only by those who could have the perfection of their own ideas with regard to the Absolute. This great legacy of our spiritual tradition helps us in purifying our own life without deviating from the performance of our assigned duties, by living a life in adoration of the Absolute. A serious appreciation of the same is likely to give our mind a true discipline of dialectics which is sure to efface all Socio-Psychological conditionings which come in our way of realization. The art and architecture of temples are nothing but profound aesthetic expressions of wisdom. Though this art is universal in its application, it is worth mentioning that India towers above great civilizations of the past in her

iconographic culture.

TEMPLE IMAGERY

At a time when the secret language of tradition is almost lost, it is very heartening to see the laudable effort of my dear friend Yati Nityachaitanya that throws some light to decipher the secrets of mystic India and her temple imagery. This noble effort is something which has been long awaited. Ours is an age, when people spend all their time and energy to accumulate material values in life. Such instances are very rare when some body of real worth gets out of this madding crowd of ignoble strife to spend his time and energy for the proper assessment of the spiritual values. By such a revaluation of religion when expressed clearly to the masses the spiritual attainment of one goes to the benefit of the multitude. There is no other activity greater than this to a wise man.

o o o